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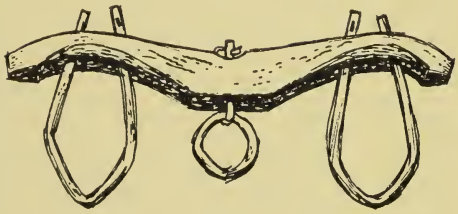
Hertz, Emanuel

Washington and Lincoln; the two master builders of the Union.

LINCOLN ROOM



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Washington and Lincoln

The two Master Builders of the Union

By

EMANUEL HERTZ.

Delivered at Fort Washington Synagogue, February 17, 1928

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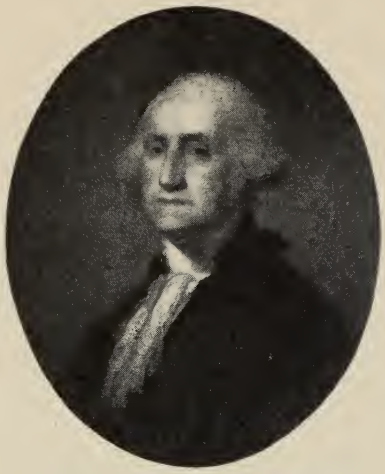
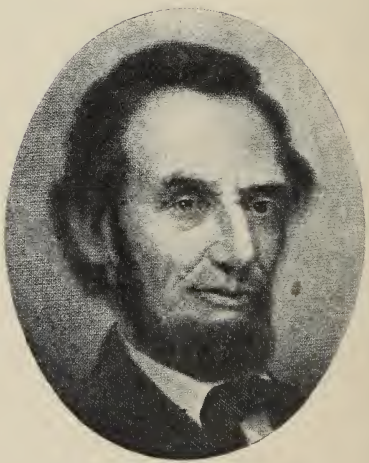


GEORGE WASHINGTON



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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WASHINGTON AND LINCOLN

By EMANUEL HERTZ

A CONTRAST between the Colonial protagonist in bringing about our independence in the struggle with Great Britain, which was even then preparing to grasp the hegemony among the world powers—and the preserver of the Republic seventy years later, has been and is today and must ever be a favorite topic of discussion. Not so much to demonstrate that either the founder or the saviour of the nation was greater, not so much to prove that either one or the other deserves more credit, more veneration for the accomplishment of a task which in either case has never been equalled; but rather to understand that both were needed, both were God-sent and Divinely ordained—one to create and make possible government by the people, the other to conserve and preserve and rescue from sedition and rebellion and civil war what his predecessor had brought about and accomplished. Here were three million English-speaking people, as much part of England as was Wales or Scotland, under circumstances which tended to make for a great universal English commonwealth with a people who read the same Bible, who pored over the same Milton and Chaucer, over the Elizabethan poets and dramatists, over the Caroline poets and historians, who followed the development and evolution of English law and Parliamentary government even as did the residents of London and Liverpool and Edinburgh. The problem of keeping these colonies in leash without permitting them to participate in the government, in the evolution, in the growth of the coming Britsih Empire—was a problem which all recognized excepting the narrow-minded ruler and his immediate cronies in the Cabinet. The elder Chatham and Burke—the two greatest minds of their day or

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for that matter of any other day in the history of Parliamentary government, saw the light of a new dawn—pleaded for fair play for the new Empire of the West, but their eloquent pleas fell upon deaf ears—and America was forever lost to England. It could not be otherwise—for Cromwell's Puritans and Rupert's Roundheads and Cavaliers were fighting for a principle in their new home—against England's hirelings picked up from the four corners of the earth, who knew not what they were fighting against.

And then the first citizen of his day—trained in warfare, trained in public affairs, a member of a remarkable body of men—and no better group ever essayed to create a nation—by his tact and patience and enormous influence, organized and brought forth a nation, patterned after the Republics of antiquity—and became its first President. The growing pains of the new giant, the problems and insuperable difficulties it encountered in a world dedicated to the principle of the divine right of kings—made the beginning so difficult that a great many thought that the young Republic would never survive—the hostility of England, the jealousy of France, and the hostile indifference of the rest of the world—all with one object in view—to crush and destroy our Republic.

But the team work of the Colonial Congress, of the Constitution makers, of John Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Franklin, Patrick Henry, Witherspoon, James Wilson and Washington brought forth a Constitution which was modelled on the experiences of the past and the lessons of the present. The Constitution was adopted, thanks to the genius and persuasive powers of Hamilton in New York and Madison in Virginia. The Constitution, as promptly strengthened by the twelve amendments, stood adamant until the real test came in 1861. John Marshall made it a living, throbbing, mighty instrument for good.

There is honor enough in the fact that George Washington was present at the birth of a nation—that he fought off its

enemies; that he set the governmental machinery in motion, and that for eight years he was at the head of affairs—and when he reads his Farewell Address, he has established the groundwork of these stupendously powerful United States of today. There may be, there are, monuments to Washington everywhere, of every kind, but his greatest monument is the Nation he created after wresting it from England's narrow-minded rulers of the Eighteenth Century.

And now the formative years of our country. With England definitely out, with England acknowledging that she was definitely beaten in 1812—we turn our attention home to see and set in order what we had won—what we conquered and what, through Jefferson, we acquired in addition. For that many-sided genius added an empire overnight to our domain, for the price of a square block in an unimportant section of New York City today. But then, we inherited the problems and the causes for conflict which drove us out of England and into the wilderness. Here we had the Puritan in the North, the Hollander in New York, the Dutchman in Pennsylvania, the Cavalier in Virginia, the Catholic in Maryland, the Dissenter in Massachusetts, Roger Williams (who had been driven out of Massachusetts) had settled in Rhode Island, the Quaker in Pennsylvania, the cotton grower and slaveholder in the South, the farmer and factory hand in the North, and the pioneer from the East gradually trecking to and opening up the great Empire in the West—and as if these were not sufficient we greeted the Spaniard in the Floridas, thrown into our lap by Andrew Jackson's romantic military exploits, and the Frenchman in Louisiana with his Code Napoleon and up the Mississippi whither Father Marquette and his resolute band had taken them. And then from the very heart of France came the best blood of the Huguenots such as had not been massacred with Coligny on Bartholomew's Night—and the Jewish people, too, came from the Netherlands, from the South Americas—and after 1848 from Germany and the process of

making the American was on. We can almost see that when the Almighty came to make the American who was to have sway in this land—planted upon and springing from the Bible, he took from Palestine its religion and philosophy and the Bible—God's greatest boon to mankind; from Greece the arts and beauty; law from Rome; from Holland the spirit of liberty and tolerance; from France and England and Germany the sciences, the orderly processes of modern life; from Spain color and chivalry and the spirit of discovery; and the noblest fruits of the Rennaissance—art in the highest forms—from Italy, and so merged and mingled and re-enforced all these in the cauldron of creation that the finished product was none other than the American!

The first great problem with which we were then confronted was the question whether the immortal Declaration, the joint intellectual product of the three million colonists was a truth or a scrap of paper. For forty years the great joint debate lasted—and upon that great stage came all the leaders and thinkers and statesmen of the day and of the epoch—beginning with that remarkable trio of statesmen—Webster and Clay and Calhoun and ending with Stephens and Seward and Douglas. All were heard, all gave the best in their life for their ideas, and the whole country was the interested audience, and actively participated in answering the question whether this country would be free—and endure.

Many a Presidential election was fought and won on one phase or another of this great controversy. Personal ambitions were submerged in the tremendous clash of national ambitions, whole sections of the country were transformed as to their political opinions. Families were broken up, institutions vanished, political parties disappeared, a whole section of the country had to be made over before this elemental question was properly answered and the problem depending on the question adequately and definitely solved. An entire school of statesmen who thought that they were heaven-sent to adjust this

national clash between North and South, passed from the stage—completely disappointed and broken-hearted—because they did not understand the gravity of the situation. Another class of statesmen who saw and understood the gravity of the problem, had no adequate solution and followed the will-o-the-wisps of compromise and delay. It also came to pass that the policy of pacification and of postponement of the evil day came to an end. This situation could not be postponed, could not be sidestepped, could not be delayed, could not be adjusted except in one way. The whole country, while sick at heart of the controversy, while dreading the consequences, was nevertheless aware of the fact that there must be some solution of these old and ever-recurring problems—but no one had shown that he knew the solution—no one, either, directly or by insinuation, could be induced to pronounce a formula which would please all the parties concerned—a policy of drifting under Buchanan's inept and meaningless admiration then ensued for a short while—then the whole country was startled by the appearance of a man in the Middle West—who spoke so clearly that all could understand:

> * * * "'A house divided against itself cannot stand.' I believe that this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South."

Who was this man who had thus spoken? Where did he come from? Where had he mastered the principles involved in the conflict of forty years, to be thus able to pronounce a formula which no one could honestly controvert and which no one could gainsay? This man, who said: "Let us try to do our duty as we understand it. Let us have faith in the fact that

right makes might." Then people began to hear from his friends, from his neighbors, from his clients, from his legislative comrades, from the Judges before whom he had practiced, from the lowly he had befriended, that the man who was driving Douglas from political life, was the man who had studied and digested and comprehended this cancer at the heart of the Union better than any other human being living and better than the framers of the Constitution themselves. The people now began to follow him all during the Joint Debate with Douglas —to Cooper Union when he spoke to the whole country—and clung to him and to his words until they brought him to Washington, the first Commoner in the seat of the mighty—of the statesman, the scholar, the gentleman, the aristocrat and the patrician, of the scion of the blue-blooded hierarchy of the South. A farm hand in the White House—a Mississippi boatman in the White House, a country lawyer pleading petty causes in the White House—a poor man with practically no family history, no family connections, in the seat of Washington—the wealthiest man of his day, in the seat of Madison and John Quincy Adams, the most cultured men of their day and generation. There must be some mistake, some accident, this man with the old duster, with the shawl about his giant shoulders, this cadaverous-looking individual with the cavernous eyes, ill-kempt, ill-clad, this crude frontiersman, he certainly cannot be the leader in this epoch-making struggle—which might spell the doom of the Republic. We need a statesman of the Seward type, of the Chase type, of the Sumner type. We need a trained diplomat, a seasoned executive. No, there was no mistake. "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." From the depths he had chosen his instrument, his messenger, to go and tell the modern Pharaoh of Slavery that his day of power was over; and to the people he said:

> "Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the

bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said: 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' "

And so, unwillingly, hesitatingly, pleading for peace, appealing to his misguided countrymen in vain, Father Abraham called for men, for munitions, for money to fight and preserve what the fathers had founded. And we see him surmount all the difficulties, we see him undo all the harm, all that was caused by the sins of omission and of commission, by a supine if not a cowardly administration which preceded him and which almost wrecked the Union—we see him organize an army and navy anew—the real soldiers were with the South—we saw him inaugurate a blockade which strangled Southern commerce, a diplomatic service which gathered information wherewith Lincoln could counteract every plot and scheme which tended to bring recognition to the Confederacy from abroad. He held his enemies at home in check—he helped his splendid war governors in keeping the great Northern states not only loyal but ready to make every sacrifice required to save the Union. He gave his attention to press and pulpit in order to have the common people properly informed and exhorted to stand solidly behind their annointed leader in the holy war of the Union. With the precision of destiny came blow upon blow, the Emancipation Proclamation, failure to attain recognition abroad, Gettysburg, Vicksburg, the War of attrition under Grant, Sherman, Sheridan and Thomas, and a host of brilliant Northern soldiers—all trained during the agonizing first years of the War when the South seemed to be winning. Finally Appomatox—when all that made up the Richmond government collapsed—and even Robert E. Lee saw and pronounced the doom of the Confederacy, and urged his misguided and disillusioned countrymen to return to the Union.

Enough has been stated to place the two great Americans side by side, not for comparison but in order to demonstrate that the same Providence which guided the destinies of these colonies for eight long years—until England yielded to the inevitable and made peace and acknowledged the sovereignty of the United States which soon thereafter became a Nation, the same Providence came to our assistance when the even more important question came up for final settlement whether this country could be half slave and half free—whether this country could remain a Republic while it was contaminated by the Moloch of slavery—whether this country was to remain a loosely jointed Confederation of quarreling states, whether it was to become split up like the South American Republics or the Balkan States, or be an indestructible Union of indestructible States—was it to be a Nation or a mob?

Through the divine interference and through the life and efforts of Lincoln, these questions were answered in a way that no future recurrence of these ailments are conceivable. The Constitution was so amended that at no time will one being garner what the other achieves by the sweat of his brow. All are alike before the law—which countenances no other government than that of the people—who make and unmake government by the people, and all are concerned that the best measure of self-government shall be safeguarded for all the people of the land founded by Washington and recemented and saved by Lincoln.

"Two stars alone of primal magnitude,
Turn beacons in our firmanent of fame,
Shine for all men with benison the same;
On day's loud labor by the night renewed,
On templed silences where none intrude,
On leaders followed by the streets's acclaim,
The solitary student by his flame,

The watcher in the battle's interlude.
All ways and works of men they shine upon;
And now and then beneath their golden light
A sudden meteor reddens and is gone;
And now and then a star grows strangely bright,
Drawing all eyes, then dwindles on the night;
And the eternal sentinels shine on."

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